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ABSTRACT

Administrator selection is of increasing importance due to the critical relationship between administration and school success. To determine the extent of incorporation of the assessment center method--a source of skill information used for administrator selection and development--into administrator preparation programs, sets of data-gathering materials were mailed to chairpersons of 50 University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) member institutions and 54 nonmember institutions that may qualify for future UCEA membership. The institutional response rate was 64 percent for members and 63 percent for nonmembers. Results indicate that: (1) about 25 percent of both groups use assessment center method principles as key elements in departmental coursework; (2) few departments had developed assessment centers for administrative roles or had held conferences on the assessment method within the past year; and (3) interest in assessment centers among universities is generally low, has declined in a few areas, but has increased slightly within the past year. (KM)

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Use of the Assessment Center Method in Administrator Preparation Programs

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Method

Purpose. The purpose of the study is to determine the extent of incorporation of the assessment center method in administrator preparation programs of: (a) institutions with membership in the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and (b) a random sample of other institutions which might qualify for membership in UCEA, e.g., they grant doctoral degrees in Educational Administration.

Instrumentation. Survey instruments and cover letters were drafted and submitted to members of the Advisory Committee of the University Council for Educational Administration Program Center for Assessment Center Methodology. The first drafts of the cover letters and questionnaires were revised in accordance with suggestions provided by the members of the Advisory Committee. The survey materials were sent to department chairpersons who were asked to complete the "Department Chairperson Survey" and to distribute copies of the "Faculty Member Survey." Each survey had an attachment of a cover letter and postage-paid, return envelope. Only one mailing was made.

Sample. Materials were sent to the chairpersons of the fifty institutions that are members of the University Council for Educational Administration and to fifty-four institutions that are not members of UCEA. Each chairperson received a set of data-gathering materials for distribution to ten faculty members. The exact number of faculty members who received questionnaires

is not known; consequently, a return rate for faculty members cannot be figured.

Need for the study. The work of educational administrators is under close scrutiny, especially since the publication of A Nation at Risk by the National Commission on Excellence in Education; Action for Excellence by the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth of the Education Commission of the States; Making the Grade by the Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy of the Twentieth Century Fund; Education and Economic Progress: Toward a National Education Policy by the Carnegie Corporation; and Leaders for America's Schools by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration; among others. While critics of public education allege deplorable conditions in schools, researchers have documented the positive correlation of successful administrators and effective schools. Education reformers and critics have identified the need for changes in school systems; decisions about what must be changed and how those changes are to be implemented must be planned and executed by skilled administrators.

The assessment center method is a source of information about the skills of administrators that is used for both selection and developmental purposes. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has had an Assessment Center Project since 1975 that focuses upon selection criteria for building administrators. The NASSP Assessment Center Project

includes 50 affiliated centers in the United States, and three in Australia, Canada, and West Germany. Nearly 4,000 individuals have received assessor training and more than 7,000 have participated in an assessment center. In the three years of the existence of the Springfield Development Program, approximately 1,000 individuals have been trained in administrative and interpersonal skills.

NASSP's Assessment Center Project is a validated selection method (Schmitt, 1981) and is recognized as an exemplary alternative approach to principal selection (Baltzell and Dentler, 1983). The latter study, funded by the National Institute of Education, was prompted by a realization that more needed to be known about how educational leaders were chosen. In addition, Baltzell and Dentler (1983) also documented the increasing importance of selection because of the critical relationship of administration to the success of schools, the need for non-discriminatory practices, and the anticipated high rate of turn-over for administrators in the next two decades.

Moreover, other organizations have also recognized the benefits of the assessment center method. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) is developing an Assessment Center Project to: (a) provide resources for the identification and improvement of skills of practicing superintendents through professional development, (b) provide candidates for superintendency positions with profiles of themselves that they may choose to use to assist in a job

selection process, and (c) assist universities in the assessment of candidates for superintendency preparation programs (emphasis added).

Since 1983 the University Council for Educational Administration has had a Program Center for Assessment Center Methodology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. One of the major reasons for the establishment of the Program Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was that it was the first university in the nation to be accredited with NASSP's Assessment Center Project. In 1980, together with its Partnership School, the Lincoln Public Schools, the Department of Education Administration entered the NASSP Assessment Center Project. The NASSP Center in Nebraska has a different focus than that of other assessment center projects which focus primarily upon the selection of building administrators. The Nebraska Center has three purposes:

1. to assess persons enrolled in graduate preparation programs in school administration with data being used to help these students plan individual learning activities for professional development,
2. to assess persons employed as building administrators so that assessment data could be used to plan administrator in-service and development programs, and
3. to assess persons seeking employment as building administrators in school districts when districts contract for such services.

Interest in the assessment center has extended to other organizations in education. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy has formed a Planning Group to establish a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The Board would serve as an assessment agency which would certify teachers who have passed assessments related to teaching effectiveness. Although the Board for Professional Teaching Standards would not be related to administration, the formation of such a Board is another indication of the interest and increasing emphasis upon assessment of skills in education.

The widespread use of the assessment center method in other public agencies and in business and industry, the success of the NASSP Assessment Center Project, and the inauguration of AASA's Assessment Project provide substantive reasons for research on the use of the method in administrator preparation programs.

Department Chairperson Survey

Of the 50 chairpersons from UCEA member institutions, 32 responded (64% return rate). Thirty-four chairpersons (63%) from 54 non-UCEA institutions responded to the survey. Not all chairpersons responded to each question so the grouped data reflect selected responses.

Operations of Assessment Centers

Location of centers. To the first question, "In your state, is there an operating assessment center?" 21 (70%) of 30 UCEA department chairpersons responded affirmatively and 24 (77.4%) of 31 non-UCEA chairpersons agreed. Many of the assessment centers

that were named are located at universities: George Mason, Georgia State, Houston, Kansas, Louisville, Mississippi, Nebraska, Northern Iowa, Old Dominion, Rochester, Texas, Tulsa, Utah, Virginia Tech, Western Michigan, and Wichita State. In two states, Arkansas and South Carolina, assessment centers are operated by the state department of education. In other states, administrators' organizations and regional or statewide consortia were identified as operational centers.

Consortia. Fourteen (45.2%) UCEA chairpersons, or nearly half, indicated their departments were members of a consortium or network that had assessment centers as a major interest. About a third (35.3%) of the non-UCEA chairpersons noted that their departments were in a consortium or network.

Insert Figure 1 about here

About two of five (42.4% of UCEA and 40% of non-UCEA) departments participated in an assessment center. Seven of the 13 (53.8%) UCEA chairpersons indicated their departments had plans to enter into an assessment center within the next 12 months but only one of 20 (5%) non-UCEA chairpersons expressed a similar intention.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Of the UCEA institutions, slightly less than one in five (19.4%) served as the headquarters for an assessment center while approximately the same proportion (17.6%) of non-UCEA institutions acted as an assessment center headquarters.

Effect of Assessment Centers

Assessment for certification. While none of the 32 responding UCEA chairpersons replied that their departments had initiated an assessment center to meet state certification or endorsement requirements, two (6%) of the non-UCEA institutions had done so.

Required student participation in assessment. A small number (2 of 32 or 6.3%) of UCEA departments require students enrolled in their preparation programs to participate in an assessment center. Of these two, one required participation for entrance into a program while the other required participation for exit from the program. Only one (3%) non-UCEA department requires students to participate in an assessment center both for entrance into and exit from the preparation program.

Voluntary student participation in assessment. A greater number of departments allow students to participate voluntarily in assessment. Only a little over one-fourth (28.1%) of UCEA departments offer voluntary participation in an assessment center, but over half (52.9%) of non-UCEA institutions let students voluntarily engage in assessment in their preparation programs.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Participation by Faculties

Training of faculty as assessors. UCEA department chairpersons reported 277 full-time faculty members in their departments; of this number, 45 (16.2%) are trained assessors. In non-UCEA departments, 43 of 222 (19.4%) full-time faculty members were reported to be trained assessors.

Impact on courses. Department chairpersons were asked, "Within the last 12 months, has your department offered a course in which principles of the assessment center method are key elements?" Eight (25%) UCEA department chairpersons answered affirmatively and a similar number of non-UCEA chairpersons (9, or 28.1%) responded that principles of the assessment center method were used as key elements in courses. UCEA department chairpersons noted use of the method in two courses while non-UCEA institutions reported that principles of the assessment center method were used in three courses at two institutions and in four courses at another.

Official stance. In response to, "Has your department faculty taken any official action or position regarding the assessment center method?" eight UCEA department chairpersons and eight non-UCEA department chairpersons (25% and 23.5% respectively) indicated their faculty had taken a position regarding the use of assessment centers.

Incorporation of skill dimensions. Fourteen (43.8%) UCEA departments have reportedly redesigned their administrator preparation programs to include behavioral or skill dimensions similar to those used in assessment centers. The same number of non-UCEA departments (45.2%) have followed suit in redesigning their preparation programs. Half of the 14 UCEA departments and 11 (78.6%) of the non-UCEA institutions have redesigned their programs within the past 12 months.

Local development of assessment centers. The chairpersons were asked to indicate if their departments had developed their own assessment center for specific administrative roles. The UCEA chairpersons reported: (a) four departments had developed assessment centers for building administrators, elementary school principals, middle level school principals, junior high school principals, secondary school principals, and senior high principals and (b) one department had developed assessment centers for superintendents and for central office administrators. From non-UCEA chairpersons, the reported number of assessment centers developed locally for administrative roles was two for building administrators, elementary school principals, middle level school principals, junior high school principals, secondary school principals, and senior high principals. No UCEA or non-UCEA institution reported the development of an assessment center for school business officers or for post-secondary administrators.

Conferences. About one in eight (12.1%) UCEA department chairpersons reported that their departments had sponsored a conference on the use of the assessment center method within the last 12 months, but only one (3%) non-UCEA institution had done so.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Funding. Within the past 12 months, eight (23.5%) UCEA departments received funding for assessment center activities. The following information was provided: $230,000 from Project LEAD; $103,000 from private business and the state department; $42,000 from participating school districts; $30,000 from school districts and an Industrial Management Council; and an amount of $10,000 to $20,000 with no identified source. Two chairpersons reported sources only: LEAD and local districts. About the same proportion (21.2%) of non-UCEA departments received funding from outside sources for assessment center activities. One chairperson reported $150,000 from a LEAD Project; in one state the Governor was cited for providing $70,000; one university contributed $45,000; and other sources cited were local superintendents and college dean/department funds.

Level of interest. The last question asked department chairpersons was, "What is the level of interest in assessment centers of faculty members from other universities with

administrator preparation programs in your region?" The responses were as follows:

Insert Table 1 about here

In both UCEA and non-UCEA departments, chairpersons characterized interest in the assessment center as more likely to be "none to slight" to "mild" but "increasing from a year ago." Only about one in ten chairpersons indicated that they perceived "keen interest" in the assessment center method in most of the universities in their respective region.

Faculty Member Survey

The exact number of faculty members who received questionnaires is not known, therefore, a return rate cannot be tabulated. Of the UCEA member institutions, 128 faculty members responded, and the survey was returned by 97 non-UCEA faculty members.

Faculty Participation

Training of faculty as assessors. The first question asked on the questionnaire, "Have you been trained as an assessor in an assessment center project?" elicited a positive response from 34 (26.6%) of the 128 UCEA faculty members who participated in the survey. The majority of the UCEA faculty respondents who had been trained as assessors completed their training recently (1986 and 1987) in assessment centers located primarily in mid-western and southern locations: Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan,

Nebraska, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin. The operational centers included administrators' organizations, state educational administration departments, statewide consortia, and universities.

Thirty-one (31.9%) of the 97 non-UCEA faculty members had been trained as assessors. As was true of the UCEA faculty members, the assessment center locations were representative of a diverse area and the training had occurred recently (1986 and after).

Research by faculty on assessment method. Within the last 12 months, 11 (8.9%) UCEA affiliated faculty members and seven (7.1%) non-UCEA faculty members have completed research projects on the assessment center method. A greater percentage of respondents made presentations on the assessment center method: 25 (20.5%) UCEA faculty members and 23 (23.5%) non-UCEA faculty members. Five (4.1%) UCEA faculty have published assessment material; publications include five journal articles and one book chapter. Four (4.1%) non-UCEA faculty published assessment material: a journal article, a monograph, a position paper, and a book chapter.

Student participation in assessment. The influence of the assessment center method in preparation programs appears to be greater in UCEA member institutions. Thirty-two (26.4%) of the UCEA faculty members indicated they have "provisions for measuring, recording, and reporting students' behaviors or skills as done in an assessment center" at one or more steps in their

preparation programs. The number of positive UCEA responses can be compared with the 13 (13.7%) positive responses from non-UCEA faculty members. As to whether "there were assessment center related provisions for students at their entrance" in the respective preparation programs, 19 (15.8%) UCEA faculty indicated there were as opposed to eight (8.5%) non-UCEA faculty. Provisions for measuring, recording, and reporting students' skills as done in assessment centers at students' exit from the preparation programs was reported by 11 (9.3%) UCEA faculty members as compared with five (5.4%) non-UCEA faculty members. Seven (6%) UCEA faculty members and four (4.3%) non-UCEA faculty had provisions for measuring, recording, and reporting students' skills as done in an assessment center in both entrance into and exit from their respective programs.

Incorporation of skill dimensions. Faculty members were asked, "Within the last 12 months, in how many of the courses that you taught did you use the following -- behavioral or skill dimensions as used in assessment centers, simulation activities, multiple professors to measure and grade student achievement." In Table 2 is a comparison of assessment center activities integrated in courses taught by UCEA or non-UCEA faculty members. Nearly twice as many behavioral and skill activities are used in UCEA faculty course work although a sizeable number of non-UCEA faculty also incorporate assessment center methods in their courses. Simulation activities are a key element in the course work of both UCEA and non-UCEA faculty members. The use of

multiple professors to measure and grade student achievement is emphasized to a greater extent in UCEA course work.

Insert Table 2 about here

Other assessment activities used by UCEA faculty members in their courses include: case studies; in-basket; supervision, evaluation, and selection; a professor as Resource on Center; and multiple measures of practices subjected to congruence analysis technique. Non-UCEA faculty members specified they used development of attribution training materials and the seminar in their courses.

Assessment Center Activities. Specific assessment center exercises which are integrated in the courses taught include in-baskets, leaderless group discussions, fact-finding exercises, and structured interviews. Below is a table indicating the use of assessment exercises in course work of UCEA and non-UCEA faculty members.

Additional assessment center activities that UCEA and non-UCEA faculty members specified as being used in their courses were: controlled brainstorming/conflict resolution; Board of Education Meeting simulations; group projects; supervision of teaching; role playing; case studies; small group activities (structured differently than leaderless groups are typically done); laboratory exercise; and case and protocol analysis.

Another question asked, "Within the last 12 months, have you produced any simulation material of the following kinds: in-basket, leaderless group discussions, fact-finding exercises, or structured interview?" The response of the two groups is noted in Figure 5.

Insert Figure 5 about here

With the exception of fact-finding exercises, the two groups appear to produce a similar amount of simulation material in their courses. Other simulation material specified as being produced by the UCEA faculty included: school finance to business management; conflict resolution; board meetings; essay-personnel interpretation; computer managed case studies; educational situations; test items for cognition; and classroom observation activity. The title and publishers of simulation material produced by UCEA faculty within the last 12 months include TECE-FINANCE (not published) available from Department of Education Administration, Texas A & M University; TAMU team developed materials for use with students; and The Alien (Teacher's Group Activity) unpublished classroom material, Missouri Department of Elementary to Secondary Education.

In addition to the preceding, non-UCEA faculty members have produced simulation material in their courses: annual educational budget, attribution training/critical incidents, community study experiences, interactive video pre-master's

degree assessment, telephone communication and priorities, and school district budget simulations. Simulation material produced by non-UCEA faculty members is available from: Northwest Regional Lab; PETC II Materials DOE; and FL and Administration Superintendent Candidate Selection Program -- produced at Center for School Personnel Relations, Kent State University.

Completion of theses, dissertations, and other research by advisees. Advisees of the 128 responding non-UCEA faculty members have completed seven dissertations and two theses "following the assessment center method" while three dissertations and one thesis have been completed by advisees of the 97 UCEA faculty members within the last 12 months. No manuscripts were completed by UCEA faculty members' advisees, but three manuscripts have been accepted for publication and one manuscript published by the advisees of non-UCEA faculty members.

Level of interest. The response by faculty members to the final question: "What is your level of interest in the assessment center method?" is as follows:

Insert Table 4 about here

In both UCEA and non-UCEA institutions, faculty members' interest appears to be increasing from a year ago. The level of interest would appear to be consistent with the incorporation of the assessment center method in course work of the faculty members.

Summary

The responses to the questions in the department chairperson survey come from comparably sized groups - 32 chairpersons from UCEA and 34 from non-UCEA institutions. The return rate from each group was about the same (64 and 63% respectively). The return rate of the questionnaire by UCEA and non-UCEA faculty members cannot be tabulated because the exact number of faculty members who received the survey is not known.

Assessment centers operate in about three-fourths of the states where the respondents are located, and both UCEA and non-UCEA member universities serve as headquarters for assessment centers. Overall, about 40% of the universities are members of consortia or networks that operate assessment centers. UCEA department chairpersons indicated a greater intent (53.8%) to enter into an assessment center program within the next year than did those from non-UCEA institutions (5%). Slightly less than one in five from both groups serve as headquarters for an assessment center. The degree of participation in assessment centers at the department level is about equal between the two groups.

Only two (both non-UCEA institutions) of the 66 respondents indicated that their departments had initiated an assessment center to meet state certification or endorsement requirements. Perhaps because there are no mandates to conduct assessment centers, only three institutions require students in their administrator preparation programs to participate in an

assessment center. About a fourth of the UCEA institutions and a half of the non-UCEA institutions allow students to volunteer to be assessed.

The chairpersons indicated the proportion of faculty members who have received training as assessors is similar: 16% for UCEA and 19% for non-UCEA. The faculty member survey revealed a greater proportion of faculty members had received assessor training: 26.6% of the UCEA faculty and 31.9% of non-UCEA faculty.

A somewhat larger percentage of institutions (about 25% for both groups) use the principles of the assessment center method as key elements in course work offered by the department. About the same ratio of departments (nearly 25%) has adopted an official position regarding the assessment center method. Almost half of the institutions (44% for UCEA and 45% for non-UCEA members), reportedly redesigned preparation programs to incorporate behavioral or skill dimensions; a larger proportion of non-UCEA members (79%) had done so within the last year than UCEA members (45%).

Few departments (four UCEA and two non-UCEA) have developed assessment centers for specific administrative roles or held conferences on the assessment center method within the past year. About one in five universities, though, had received funding for assessment center activities, ranging from $280,000 from federal funds to a few hundred dollars for a research project. The source and amount of outside funds were a function of local

conditions and resulted from organizational relationships with government agencies and local school districts.

Research completed by faculty on the assessment method is parallel with the non-UCEA faculty having a slight edge in the number of publications. The greatest dissimilarities between the two groups is in the incorporation of the assessment center method in measuring, recording, and reporting students' skills. More than twice as many UCEA faculty members indicate that assessment criteria are incorporated in their programs. This same difference is reflected in the courses taught by UCEA faculty members; the integration of behavioral and skill dimensions and specific assessment center exercises in course work is double that of non-UCEA faculty. However, the production of simulation material by UCEA and non-UCEA faculty is approximately the same.

The perceptions of the chairpersons and faculty members about the level of interest in assessment centers among the universities in their respective regions provides a form of face validity to the responses to the preceding items in the survey: interest is generally low, declining in a few places, but "increasing slightly within the last 12 months." Based upon the degree of participation in assessment centers as reported by the department chairpersons, their collective perception of the interest in the assessment center method corroborates the use of the assessment center method at the department level.

Differences in the use of the assessment center method in administrator preparation programs between UCEA and non-UCEA member institutions at the departmental level is negligible.

Table 1

Perceived level of interest in assessment centers by department chairpersons.

	UCEA		non-UCEA	
	No.	%	No.	%
None to slight in this region	6	18.8	7	25.0
Of declining interest from a year ago	1	3.1	3	10.7
Of increasing interest from a year ago	9	28.1	11	39.3
Of mild interest in less than half the universities	8	25.0	4	14.3
Of keen interest in most of the universities in this region	4	12.5	3	10.7
Don't know	4	12.5	0	0.0
Total	32	100.0	28	100.0

Table 2

Assessment center methods used in courses by UCEA and non-UCEA faculty members.

Number of Courses	Method					
	Behavioral or skill dimensions		Simulation activities		Multiple professors	
	U	nU	U	nU	U	nU
1	24	13	27	12	19	7
2	16	13	33	25	4	2
3	2	2	7	8	1	0
4	1	1	4	2	0	1
5	0	0	0	1	0	0
6	0	0	4	0	1	0
7	0	0	0	2	0	0
8	0	1	0	1	0	0
9+	0	1	0	1	0	0

U = UCEA

nU = non-UCEA

Table 3

Assessment center exercises used in courses by UCEA and non-UCEA faculty members.

	Exercise							
	In-baskets		Leaderless groups		Fact-finding exercises		Structured interviews	
Number of Courses	U	nU	U	nU	U	nU	U	nU
1	28	14	24	11	18	13	23	12
2	18	13	20	15	16	7	14	10
3	2	5	7	2	1	4	0	3
4	2	0	6	4	2	5	2	0
5	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
6	0	0	3	2	3	0	0	0
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0

U = UCEA

nU = non-UCEA

Table 4

Perceived level of interest in the assessment center method by faculty members.

	UCEA		non-UCEA	
	No.	%	No.	%
None to slight	23	18.7	14	15.2
Of declining interest from a year ago	5	4.1	10	10.9
Of increasing interest from a year ago	61	49.6	39	42.4
Of mild interest	34	27.6	29	31.5
Total	123	100.0	92	100.0

Figure Caption

FIGURE 1. Percentage of departments as members of consortium or network.

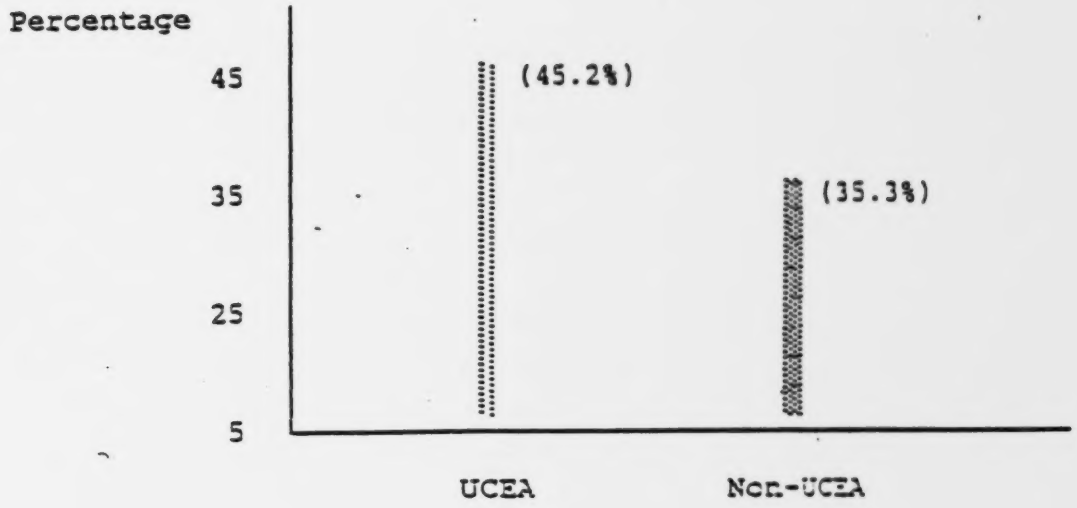

Percentage
45
35
25
5
(45.2%)
(35.3%)
UCEA
Non-UCEA

Figure Caption

Figure 2. Percentage of departments entering into an assessment center within 12 months.

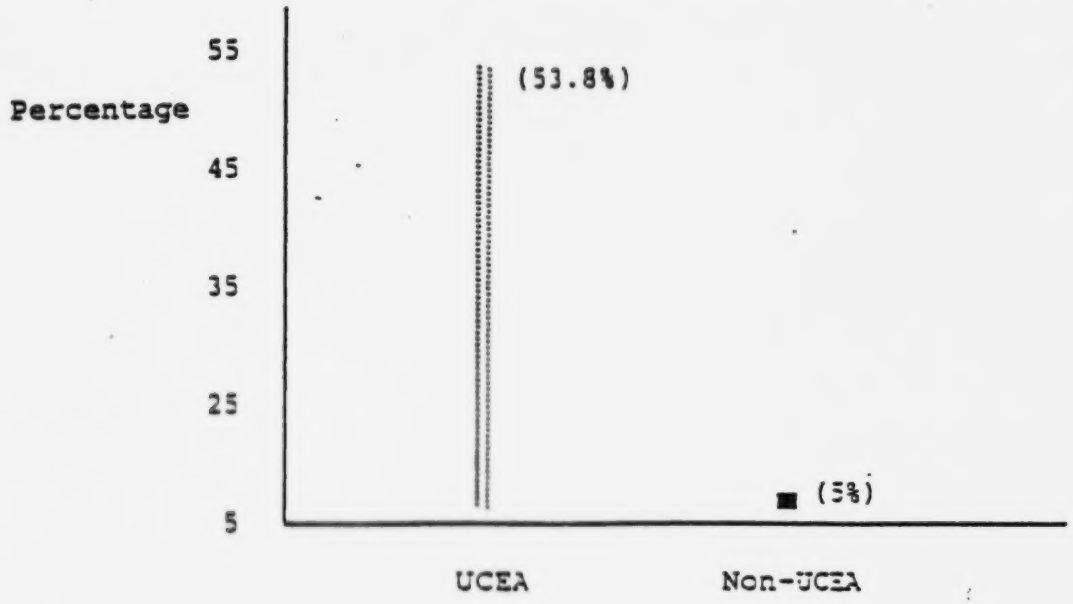

Percentage
55
45
35
25
5
(53.8%)
(5%)
UCEA
Non-UCEA

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Percentage of departments offering voluntary participation in an assessment center.

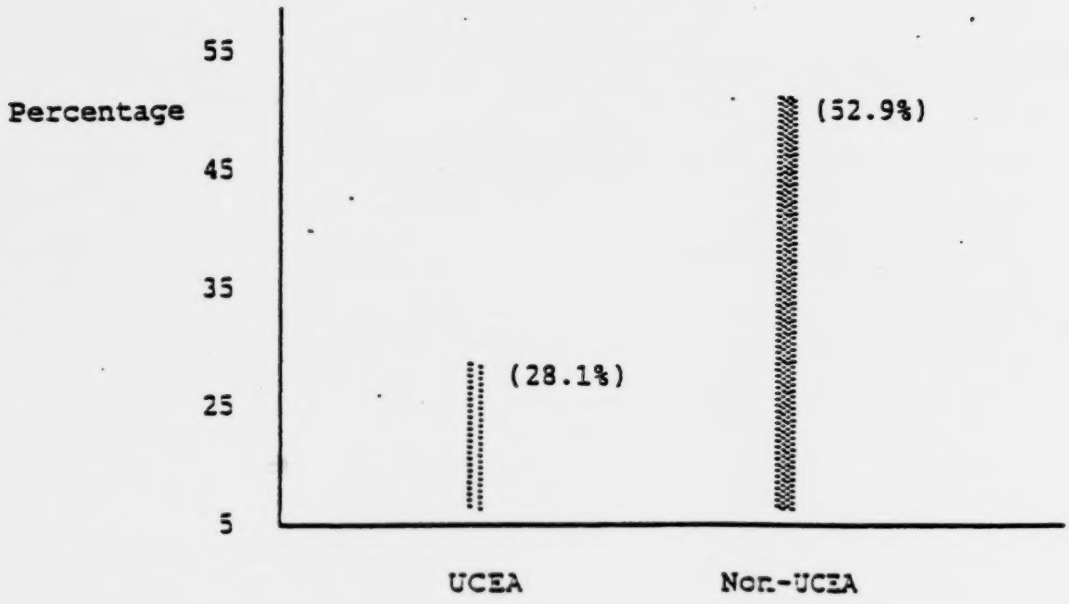

55
Percentage
45
35
25
5
(28.1%)
(52.9%)
UCEA
Non-UCEA

Figure Caption

Figure 4. Percentage of departments sponsoring a conference on the use of the assessment center method.

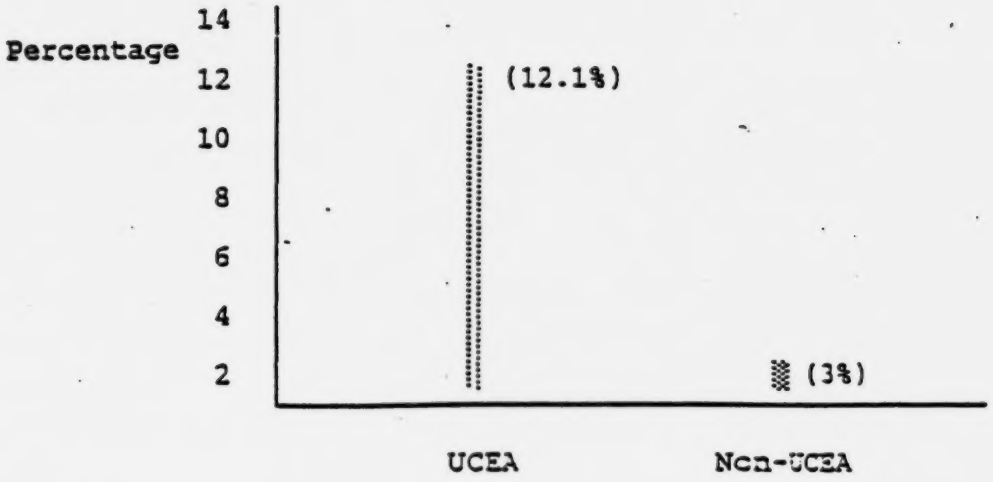
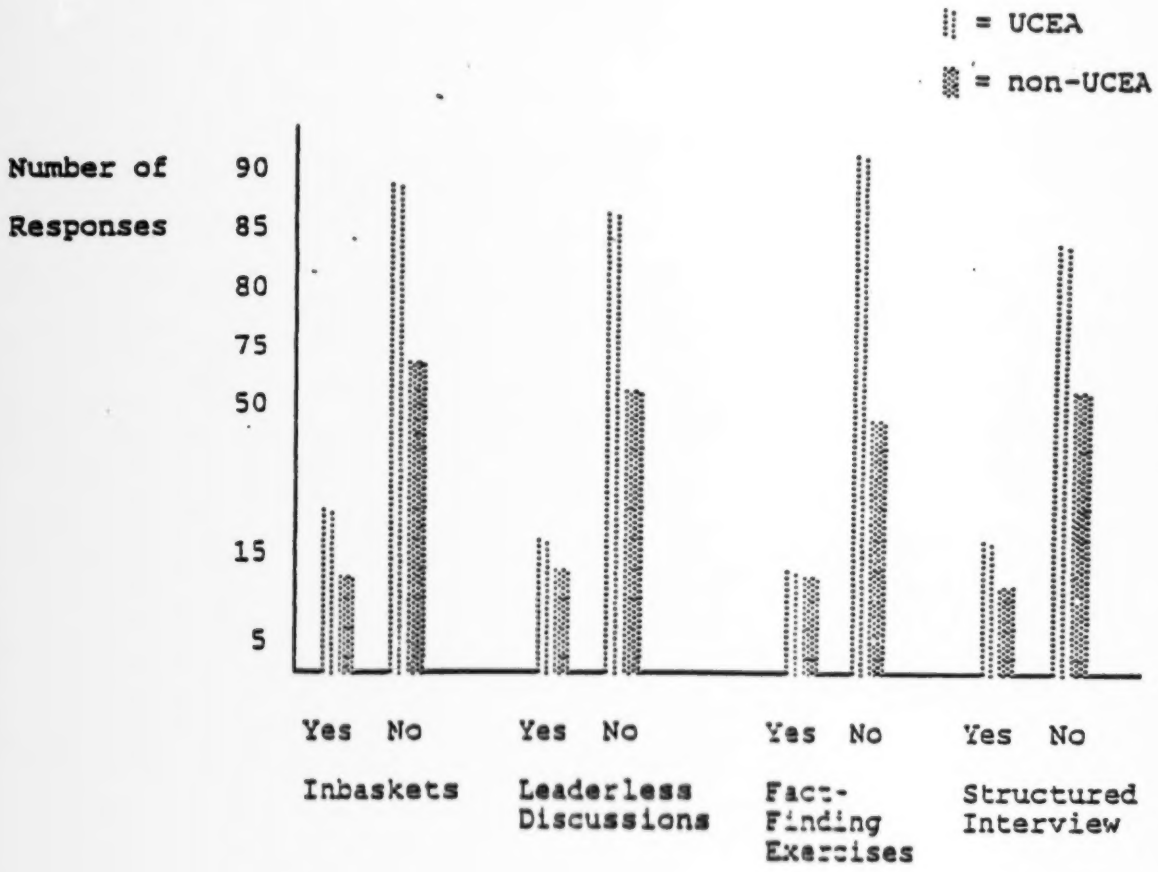

Percentage
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
(12.1%)
(3%)
UCEA
Non-UCEA

Figure Caption

Figure 5. Simulation material produced within last 12 months.


= UCEA
= non-UCEA
Number of Responses
90
85
80
75
50
15
5
Yes
No
Inbaskets
Leaderless Discussions
Fact-Finding Exercises
Structured Interview